

MORE GERMAN REALITIES

A short time ago I gave a rough outline of the progress made in the German Film Industry, both during and since the war. Although the leaders of the Trade in this country were undoubtedly aware of the giant strides which Germany has made in this direction, there were others not so well informed to whom I believe my information came as somewhat of a revelation; it may therefore be of interest to these latter readers to record another milestone in the achievements accomplished by the film world of that country.

For some months past there have been rumours of a German attempt to produce a picturisation of the life of that famous beauty, Lady (Emma) Hamilton. It will be remembered that one of our leading English film actresses was originally cast for the name part, but that she, on reading the scenario, declined the offer on the ground, it is said, that certain incidents in the script were not compatible with ideas of English art and feminine modesty.

The rumours, however, are now an accomplished fact, and I had an opportunity of witnessing a performance of this film in Germany, where it was released last week. The picture deals with the life of this beautiful lady from the time when she was but a flapper of bucolic origin, to her final relegation to the limbo of mortal obscurity after the death of Nelson at Trafalgar.

I do not suppose it will penetrate the mist of apathy with which most of the English producing companies are surrounded when I say that this film constitutes a monument of technical correctness, scenic splendour, and above all, artistic achievement which has rarely been surpassed. It is, to use their own idiom, "kolossal." By this

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I do not mean that it is a work without defect, but it is, nevertheless, a product of genius and a most enthralling entertainment.

Liane Haid, who plays lead, is, I am told, a recent discovery from Vienna. She is remarkably beautiful and her display of histrionics is most notable. She does not, however, possess the least resemblance to Romney's "Lady Hamilton," but this may well be forgiven by virtue of the ability and charm she shows, whether portraying the humble village girl, the more sophisticated artist's model, the grande-dame-wife of an English nobleman, or the bereaved and broken-hearted mistress of the great admiral. The incident to which the English actress referred to above took exception is not in effect in the least offensive. On the other hand, the studio enactment must necessarily have proved distasteful.

The performance of Werner Krauss, Germany's leading film actor, as Sir William Hamilton, is remarkable, as is also that of Conrad Veidt as Lord Nelson, although this latter actor is too tall for our conception of the famous admiral.

It has been repeatedly suggested that the German producers invariably choose periods of English and French history to picturise on the screen, which reflect little credit on the nations in question. This is presumed to be an effort at insidious propaganda. To my mind this is "catching at a stick to flog a horse." I do not believe it.

It must be obvious to anyone that the Germans are at the moment no more enamoured of us or the French, or any of their late enemies, than we are of them, and it is not to be presumed that they will spend

many millions of marks in an effort to eulogise us by the extremely powerful medium of the screen. We have, therefore, another production in "Lady Hamilton" which, as presented to the Germans, does not go out of its way to portray the best attributes of the English race. For instance, the moral reputation of our ancient aristocracy has not been enhanced at the hands of the Germans. Again, we are shown a very realistic reproduction of the Battle of Trafalgar. We get close-ups and long shots of Nelson issuing commands from the deck of the "Victory," but such sayings as "In honour I gained them, and in honour I will die with them," and his famous signal, "England expects, etc.," attributed to him, are not quoted on the screen, neither is the incident of the telescope and the blind eye dealt with.

Let us admit, however, for argument sake, that the Germans have attempted subtle vilification of their late opponents in their film productions. Whose fault is this? We are possessed of the most absorbing history in the Western world, containing every ingredient necessary for the success of a good picture, but how far, may I ask, have our English producers realised this, or made any attempt to make use of it? Moreover, there is another aspect of the case, namely, the educational value of such films. At no other period in the existence of our Empire has a certain class of the community required an imbue of patriotism as it does at the present moment, and what finer incentive to national pride and patriotism than the screen if it were only occasionally used to depict the finest incidents in English history? Again, what finer propaganda in foreign countries? I know I am going over old ground, but I make no apology. I cannot recall a single modern effort to deal with our history, bristling, as it does, with possibilities.

It will ever be to our discredit that we have so far been compelled to rely on foreign countries for the re-enactment in living picturisation of the most famous events, one result being that such events have sometimes suffered to the extent of appearing infamous. We have the ability amongst our directors, but it is the policy which is awry.

Statistics show that the German super-production, "Passion," or "Madame du Barry," has proved the fourth largest film attraction yet shown to the public of America. Rumours are current to the effect that this picture will shortly be seen at one of the large theatres in the West End. It will not be hard to imagine the storm of protest that will arise from the Trade as well as the public when this rumour becomes a concrete fact. At the present moment the prejudice against German films is inexplicably great. I say inexplicably, because we allow without a murmur to come amongst us German plays, German artists, German musicians, German scientists, and German goods, but German films have so far remained taboo. How great is the power of the screen!

It is true, I believe, that a start is shortly being made on a film to be entitled "Mary Queen of Scots," but the very able producer who is handling this production is an American citizen. It is a horrible and alarming fact, however, that the Germans have so far made the best, or rather the worst, use of our national heritage.

I believe it was Emerson who once wrote: "The fine arts have no casual existence, but spring from the instincts of the nations that create them." Thus the effigy of our glorious past is vandalised.

RECONSTRUCTING ASSOCIATED EXHIBITORS' FILM CO.

With a view to advancing its activities and placing it in the front rank of producing concerns, both at home and abroad, the Associated Exhibitors' Film Co. has, during the last fortnight, undergone a process of reconstruction. Under this scheme the company has secured the services of Herbert Willcox as managing director, whilst his brother, Charles Willcox, and J. G. Smart have joined the board of directors. While they will give the Associated Exhibitors' affairs their closest personal attention, they will at the same time continue to control the business of Astra Films, Ltd.

The other directors of the Associated who were original members of the Board are Thomas Thompson, John Briggs, Henry Victor Davis, and Charles P. Metcalfe.

No name is better known in the film industry generally than that of Mr. Thompson, who has built up a highly prosperous business of his own as an exhibitor in the North of England. He has long been a member of the C.F.A. General Council, and, in addition to being associated with other commercial enterprises, he is chairman and managing director of the North of England Cinemas, Ltd., and of General Entertainments, Ltd.

Mr. Briggs and Mr. Davis are towers of strength to the industry in Yorkshire and South Wales respectively, both holding responsible positions in the local Trade organisations. Mr. Metcalfe, besides being an old and respected film renter, is managing director of North Eastern Entertainments, Ltd., Mid-Yorkshire Entertainments, Ltd.,

and the Leeds Entertainments, Ltd., and other undertakings.

The avowed policy of the undertaking on its formation to bring about a closer co-operation between all three branches of the Trade and to produce films which will form a ready market both in this country and abroad will not only be continued but considerably extended.

The company has already completed two films, which will be submitted for the approval of the Trade at an early date, namely, "Love in the Hills" and "The Corner Man." They are stories of two different types, but each has its own distinct character. "Love in the Hills," an original story, is a drama with love interest heightened by some tragic sequences.

"The Corner Man," also an original story, is of an entirely different character. The theme deals with the domestic affairs of a Christy minstrel and his motherless child, around whom in later years is centred a love idyll quite off the beaten track. The part of the minstrel is in the capable hands of Hugh E. Wright, whose impersonations in "Nothing Else Matters," "Garryowen," and other films won for him such high eulogiums both in the Trade and Lay Press.

The intention of the directors is to commence production in the early spring of stories based on well-known works, whose authors have a great following amongst readers of fiction, and the rights of which have already been acquired. Full particulars respecting these will be announced shortly

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